

Research Article

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Author for correspondence:

Mohammad Alhroot

✉ mohammad.alhrout@gnu.edu.jo

✉ German Jordanian University, Jordan

Reflection of Multiple Verbal Nouns of Trilateral Bare Verbs in Dictionaries for Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language

Mohammad Alhroot 

Abstract

Background/purpose. The phenomenon of multiple verbal nouns for the trilateral bare verb in Arabic represents a distinctive linguistic feature shaped by social and linguistic factors across historical periods. This study pursues two primary objectives: (1) to reassess the phenomenon from the perspectives of classical Arabic linguistic heritage and modern usage; and (2) to examine how monolingual and bilingual dictionaries used in teaching Arabic as a foreign language adapt to this phenomenon.

Materials/methods. The study employs descriptive statistics to determine the frequency of the phenomenon in Classical Arabic and compares it with Modern Standard Arabic using a modern, comprehensive dictionary. Additionally, the study counts instances of the phenomenon in four monolingual and bilingual teaching dictionaries to examine how they have adapted to these linguistic changes.

Results. The study concluded that the phenomenon of multiple verbal nouns for a single verb has noticeably declined in Modern Standard Arabic. While this feature was prominent in classical linguistic references, it is now far less common in contemporary usage. This shift is clearly reflected in educational dictionaries used for teaching Arabic to non-native speakers, which tend to mostly list one verbal noun per verb. The representation of verbs with multiple verbal nouns has become increasingly rare, indicating a broader trend toward simplification and standardization in modern lexicographic practices.

Conclusion. The study underscores the importance of monitoring linguistic phenomena within the Arabic language, particularly in the context of Modern Standard Arabic. It highlights the necessity of updating educational tools and dictionaries in accordance with these phenomena. Such efforts support the advancement of high-quality, sustainable Arabic language education and ensure its alignment with contemporary linguistic and pedagogical developments, contributing directly to SDG 4: Quality Education.



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1. Introduction

The Arabic language holds a distinctive position among Semitic languages due to several unique linguistic features (Huehnergard, 2017). One of the most prominent is the occurrence of multiple verbal nouns for a single trilateral bare verb (MVSTBV). Verbal nouns (VNs) form an essential part of the nominal system in many Semitic languages (Kungle, 2024). However, Arabic stands out by generating a wide variety of VNs from a single verb (Kaye, 2007). In contrast, other Semitic languages usually employ only one or two VN forms (Brockelmann, 1916; Wright, 1966).

This phenomenon constitutes a distinctive feature of Arabic morphology. Researchers have studied it extensively, offering definitions, investigating its causes, and tracing its occurrences in early Arabic texts, such as linguistic dictionaries and historical language works.

Researchers hold varying perspectives on this phenomenon. Some view it as a distinctive feature of Arabic that sets it apart from other Semitic languages (Baalbaki, 2012). They interpret it as a reflection of Arabic's richness, marked by specific morphological functions and structural complexity. Meanwhile, others consider it one of Arabic's linguistic peculiarities (Yahya, 2011). Additionally, some contemporary scholars have even described the multiplicity found in certain Arabic linguistic phenomena, including this one, as a form of disorder (Alsalihi, 2009).

The MVSTBV phenomenon, like other linguistic features, remains deeply rooted in the Arabic language. However, scholars continue to cite it without reexamining it in light of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). It is therefore unrealistic to assume that Arabic has remained unchanged for over fourteen centuries without undergoing any form of linguistic development or transformation (Belinkov et al., 2019).

Based on this, it became important for linguistic researchers in both classical Arabic (CA) and MSA to move from generalization to specification when addressing the phenomenon of MVSTBV. Additionally, they needed to shift from assumptions to actual usage. This shift is essential for the Arabic language to evolve beyond such phenomena and linguistic judgments across different eras. It requires the use of linguistic corpora and quantitative analysis, methods foundational in modern linguistic studies. The success of this approach is evident in studies that focus on clarifying the reality of various linguistic phenomena, including grammatical and morphological judgments (Alhroot, 2024), as well as literary issues in Arabic (Alhroot & Al-Hawawsheh, 2025).

This study pursues two main objectives: first, to reexamine the phenomenon of MVSTBV in Arabic through two complementary lenses—classical linguistic heritage and modern usage; and second, to evaluate how MVSTBV is represented in monolingual and bilingual dictionaries used in teaching Arabic as a foreign language (AFL).

The significance of this study lies in its engagement with a clear gap in Arabic linguistic research. Despite the widespread scholarly recognition of this phenomenon, comparative studies examining linguistic features in Arabic across different historical periods remain limited. Moreover, as a relatively rare morpho-syntactic feature among Semitic languages, this phenomenon offers valuable insight into the structure and development of Arabic.

On a practical level, the study contributes to Arabic language teaching by examining how educational dictionaries handle MVSTBV. It explores the pedagogical challenges the phenomenon may present for non-native learners due to its unfamiliar forms. Based on empirical findings, the study offers recommendations to improve curriculum development and promote more effective teaching approaches.

The following key research questions guide the study:

- How widespread is this phenomenon in CA dictionaries?

- How is the phenomenon represented in MSA dictionaries?
- Did the monolingual and bilingual dictionaries used in teaching AFL adhere to the phenomenon as it appears in classical linguistic heritage, or have they incorporated the developments that occurred in the phenomenon within modern usage?

Therefore, this study fills a critical gap by combining diachronic linguistic analysis with pedagogical considerations, aiming to contribute to both Arabic linguistics and language education.

2. Literature Review

The phenomenon of MVSTBV warrants deeper investigation beyond its traditional theoretical framing. Although some studies have examined this phenomenon through classical linguistic heritage and ancient dictionaries, they have not kept pace with the significant changes in MSA. These studies mainly rely on examples from heritage references and lack analysis that treats the phenomenon as a dynamic process evolving in its current linguistic context.

However, three studies intersect with part of the subject of this study and are worth mentioning. Alhroot & AlBdairat (2024) conducted a statistical analysis of triliteral transitive verbs in MSA to examine their VNs and determine their morphological structures. The results showed that the number of attested triliteral transitive verbs in MSA reached 606, representing no more than 3% of the total possible triliteral verbs in Arabic. Their corresponding VNs totaled 667, reflecting an increase of 61 beyond the default assumption of one noun per verb. This increase is attributed to the presence of MVSTBV. Specifically, 548 verbs appeared with a single VN, accounting for approximately 90.4% of the total. A further 55 verbs had two VNs, representing 9.1%, 12 of which exhibited lexical polysemy. Only 3 verbs were associated with three VNs, which accounts for 0.5%.

Alam and Alazmi (2023) conducted a study on the triliteral verbs and their VN in the “computational lexicon”. The study identified 8,203 triliteral verbs, totaling 15,200 VNs. Of these verbs, 4658 (56.8%) had a single VN, while 1828 (22.3%) had two. The remaining 1717 verbs contained three or more VNs, ranging from 3 to 15, accounting for 20.9%. This study provides an important database for supporting Arabic language processing applications and accurately analyzing the verbs and their VNs.

Aldawoud (2020) examined the multiple verbal nouns (MVNs) in the dictionary *Al-Qāmūs Al-Muḥīṭ* القاموس المحيط by Al-Fayroozabadi, aiming to identify the causes and factors contributing to this phenomenon. The study revealed that the occurrence of MVNs is linked to the semantic variations conveyed by a single verb, as well as the influence of ancient Arabic dialects on this diversity.

While we appreciate the significant efforts of the three studies and acknowledge the validity of their findings, the present study differs in its focus on re-examining the phenomenon of MVSTBV through both heritage and modern perspectives. Moreover, it aims to investigate the extent to which the linguistic changes in this phenomenon are reflected in monolingual and bilingual dictionaries used for teaching AFL.

3. Theoretical Framework

Many Arabic language specialists attribute this phenomenon to the diversity of ancient Arabic dialects and the variations in their meanings. However, classical linguists did not restrict themselves to setting rules based only on the standard literary form when compiling the language’s vocabulary, as one might expect (Anis, 1985). Instead, they combined CA with various regional dialects (Abdullatif, 1996), incorporating their features and traits, and documented all that they encountered.

It is undeniable that numerous examples illustrating this linguistic phenomenon can be found in ancient Arabic linguistic references. These examples appear frequently in books on grammar,

morphology, and other linguistic disciplines. They have played a vital role in firmly establishing the concept and instances of this phenomenon in the minds of successive generations of researchers and specialists over time.

Linguistic usage within a single environment often shows limited variation in the morphological forms of the same phenomenon. Therefore, placing too much emphasis on such variation within a unified linguistic setting amounts to linguistic theorizing that proves difficult to apply in practice. Evidence suggests that variation in VN forms mainly stems from dialectal diversity—that is, differences in linguistic environments shaped by geographic and demographic factors. Research demonstrates a strong connection between dialectal structure and geographic distribution (Huisman et al., 2019), the continuity of dialect areas (Heeringa & Nerbonne, 2001), the interaction of social and spatial factors (Wieling et al., 2011), the characteristics of local communities (Gordon, 2019), and the role of geographic sampling methods in identifying linguistic differences (Koile & Moroz, 2024).

The classical linguists played a pivotal role in the emergence of this phenomenon by compiling VNs in succession, often without highlighting dialectal or semantic variations in many cases. They unintentionally propagated this "illusion" through the form we observe today. Their extensive focus on listing VNs as synonymous forms significantly amplified the superficial prominence of this phenomenon. This scenario is merely an extension of the role that linguistic works have historically played in amplifying linguistic phenomena in Arabic.

3.1. The Derivation of VN in Arabic

The morphological system in Arabic is non-linear, as in other Semitic languages (Ratcliffe, 1998). Unlike Indo-European languages, which typically form words by adding affixes to a stem, Arabic relies on a root-and-pattern system (Boudelaa & Marslen-Wilson, 2015). Arabic derives most of its vocabulary by combining consonantal roots—typically consisting of three to five consonants—with specific morphological patterns (Sirhan, 2023). Word formation in Arabic is achieved by combining consonantal roots, which carry the core meaning, with specific morphological patterns, known as *Al-Awzān al-Ṣarfīyya* الأوزان الصرفية. These patterns play a crucial role in determining both the phonological and syntactic properties of the word (Aiegh-Haddad & Joshi, 2014).

The VN in Arabic, known as *maṣḍar* مَصْدَر, functions similarly to both the English infinitive (e.g., *to write*) or the gerund (e.g., *writing*) (Danks, 2011; Kaye, 2007; Kentner & Kremers, 2020). Some scholars suggest that the Arabic *maṣḍar* can fulfill both roles depending on the context, though its correspondence is clearer with the gerund form (Haddad, 2023; Hitchcock & Shakkour, 2025).

Each VN is derived from two types of verbs: bare verb (BV) *Al-fi'l al-Mujarrad* الْفِعْلُ الْمُجَرَّد (triliteral or quadriliteral verbs without additions) and augmented verb (AV) *Al-fi'l al-Mazīd* الْفِعْلُ الْمَزِيد (verbs that contain additional letters that modify the meaning of the BV) (Ryding, 2005). Therefore, the process of deriving the VN varies depending on whether the verb belongs to one of these two types. This makes the VN more closely related to verbs than to other types of nouns (Fox, 2003), although it does not carry a temporal reference as verbs do.

Although the logical assumption would be that each verb in a given linguistic context has a single VN, in Arabic, some verbs have MVSTBV. This phenomenon reflects the morphological diversity of the language, in which verbs may occur in different morphological patterns, resulting in several VNs for the same verb.

CA linguists have devoted considerable attention to VNs derived from both BV and AV. However, the lack of consensus among scholars regarding the description of VNs and the number of morphological patterns for triliteral BV highlights the multifaceted, unpredictable, and complex nature of these forms (Rosenhouse, 2003). For instance, Ibn al-Qutiyya (1993) and al-Suyuti (1998) estimated the number of patterns at 25, whereas Sibawayh (2015) suggested that the number

exceeds 32. Ibn al-Hajib (1982) reported 34, while Ibn al-Qatta' (1999) asserted that the number had reached 100; however, a review of his work reveals only 95. Although Alam and Alazmi (2023) counted 108.

Regarding VNs derived from quadriliteral BV or AV, their formation is generally more straightforward, predictable, and less complex compared to trilateral BV, except for some AV that also produce MVNs due to deviations from standard patterns, which Muhammad (2020) attributes to deviations caused by semantic variation, lexical richness, and dialectal influence. In general, most Arabic linguists agree that the phenomenon of MVSTBV is more frequently associated with trilateral BV, as the formation of their VNs lacks a single, consistent morphological pattern.

Based on this, VNs in Arabic are classified into two types:

- Regular VNs *qiyāsī* قِيَاسِيّ: These are typically derived from quadriliteral BV or AV.
- Irregular VNs *samā'ī* سَمَاعِيّ: These are most commonly derived from trilateral BV.

The fundamental verb forms, whether common simple BV or AV, are presented in Table 1, which includes 13 verb forms along with their respective VNs.

Table 1. BV and AV and their VNs in Arabic

Verbform	Pattern	VN	Example	Meaning
Form I	fa'ala فَعَلَ	non-uniform formation	kataba كَتَبَ = kitāba كِتَابَة	to write
			jalasa جَلَسَ = julūs جُلُوس	to sit
			naqala نَقَلَ = naql نَقْل	to transfer
	fa'ila فَعِلَ	non-uniform formation	'alima عَلِمَ = 'ilm عِلْم	to know
			ṭami'a طَمَعَ = ṭama طَمَع	to covet
			shariba شَرِبَ = shurb شُرْب	to drink
	fa'ula فَعُلَ	non-uniform formation	baruda بَرَدَ = burūda بُرُودَة	to cool
			baru'a بَرَعَ = barā' بَرَاعَة	to excel
			sharufa شَرَفَ = sharaḥ شَرَف	to honor
Form II	fa'ala فَعَّلَ	taf'il تَفْعِيل, taf'ila تَفْعِيلَة	qaddama قَدَّمَ = taqdīm تَقْدِيم, taqdima تَقْدِيمَة	to present
Form III	fā'ala فَاعَلَ	mufa'ala مُفَاعَلَة, fi'al فِعَال	qātala قَاتَلَ = muqātala مُقَاتَلَة, qitāl قِتَال	to fight
Form IV	af'ala أَفْعَلَ	if'al إِفْعَال	a'ṭā أَعْطَى = i'ṭā إِعْطَاء	to give
Form V	tafa'ala تَفَعَّلَ	tafa'ul تَفَاعُل	ta'allama تَعَلَّمَ = ta'allum تَعَلُّم	to learn
Form VI	tafā'ala تَفَاعَلَ	tafā'ul تَفَاعُل	tajāwaza تَجَاوَزَ = tajāwuz تَجَاوُز	to exceed
Form VII	infa'ala انْفَعَلَ	infi'al اِنْفِعَال	inkasara انْكَسَرَ = inkisār اِنْكِسَار	to be broken
Form VIII	ifta'ala افْتَعَلَ	ifti'al اِفْتِعَال	iḥtaram اخْتَرَمَ = iḥtirām اخْتِرَام	to respect
Form IX	if'alla اِفْعَلَّ	if'ilāl اِفْعِلَال	iḥmarra احْمَرَّ = iḥmirār احْمِرَار	to become red
Form X	istaf'ala اسْتَفْعَلَ	istif'al اسْتِفْعَال	istafhama اسْتَفْهَمَ = istifhām اسْتِفْهَام	to inquire
Form XII	if'awlala افْعَوَّلَ	if'ilāl اِفْعِلَال	i'shawshaba اعْشَوْشَبَ = i'shishāb اعْشِيشَاب	to become grassy
Form IIq	tafa'lala تَفَعَّلَل	tafa'lul تَفَاعُلُل	iṭma'anna اِطْمَأَنَّ = iṭmi'nan اِطْمِئْنَان	to feel reassured
Form IVq	if'alalla اِفْعَلَّل	if'illāl اِفْعِلَال	tadaḥraja تَدَحَّرَجَ = tadaḥruj تَدَحْرُج	to roll

3.2. MVSTBV in CA Between Overextension and Restriction

Many early Arabic linguists took interest in studying the phenomenon of MVSTBV, recording numerous examples in their works that clearly illustrate the wide variation in the number of VNs per verb.

A striking feature of this phenomenon lies in the significant disagreement among linguists over how many VNs each verb has. This disagreement caused the number of examples to fluctuate—rising or falling—based on each linguist’s perspective. As a result, some works came to resemble machines generating VNs, which is quite astonishing; it is difficult to believe that a single speech community used more than ten VNs for one word (Amin, 2023).

Linguistic heritage sources report that while some verbs have only two VNs, others have three or four. In rare cases, the number reached as high as sixteen—the highest count recorded by classical linguists.

Hussein (1960) argues that this phenomenon is attributable to adherents of the “analogy” school, who created regular VNs for verbs even when the original form was irregular by usage, resulting in the coexistence of two VNs

Arabic dictionaries stand among the most prominent heritage references that documented numerous instances of this phenomenon. However, these dictionaries have faced criticism from scholars for compiling multiple successive VNs for a single verb without often indicating a specific dialect or clear semantic distinction among them, as if these MVNs were equivalent and suitable for usage, with the speaker choosing freely among them.

Nevertheless, mentioning MVNs as if they were synonymous does not imply that classical authors permitted the kind of multiple usage we observe today—at least not in the forms that later emerged. The logic and reality of the language itself contradict such an interpretation. They intended to gather and document both the attested and the analogical VNs. Yet, the abundance of examples and the manner in which they were presented exaggerated the phenomenon, which—within a proportional relationship—led to the growth of morphological forms.

However, a reflective perspective, logical communicative use of the language, and the necessities of need and economy compel one to accept the notion that, although VNs may multiply in form, their competition in actual use within a single linguistic community inevitably tends to favor one, or at most two, forms, and that too under very specific linguistic conditions; since communicative necessity does not justify broader variation.

This critique does not diminish the efforts of early linguists. Rather, it aims to acknowledge and appreciate their significant contributions to Arabic lexicography. Their commitment to documenting VNs in service of the language led them to compile extensive data with great diligence. The shortcomings that emerged were not inherent to the act of compilation itself, but rather in aspects of structure, organization, and cross-referencing. While they excelled in collecting and inducing data, they often overlooked the importance of attributing VNs to specific dialects or clarifying their semantic distinctions. As a result, their work, though rich in content, lacked a framework that would have better contextualized and categorized this morphological diversity.

3.3. MVSTBV in MSA Between Excess and Deficiency

Language is not an ideal being marked by stability, nor is it a collection of archaeological artifacts in a museum. Rather, it is a living entity subject to the law of development and responsive to the transformations of time and the demands of human reality. However, when language is wrapped in a set of ready-made judgments rooted in past experiences, or embalmed by a series of fixed phenomena, it becomes surrounded by an aura of sanctity.

If we believe that language is a social phenomenon and a human behavior, this is a clear admission that language does not remain fixed in one state. It evolves according to the demands of its era. There is no doubt that language absorbs this development and meets its needs across various levels. The evidence for this is clear: a word may disappear in a later age after having been widespread in a former one; or a rule that was rarely used in one period may become more frequent in another. Likewise, a commonly used expression may lose its place and become less frequent—or even fall into disuse—over time. Change can affect grammar, morphology, semantics, and phonology, depending on several influencing factors (Mantiri, 2010).

Language, by principle, must be studied descriptively in every era, based on its current usage. This applies to MSA, which cannot bear the inheritance of linguistic phenomena or judgments transmitted from earlier linguists and once attributed to Arabic in a certain time. To generalize such phenomena and judgments across different historical stages without reevaluating them is unjust. It traps us within the boundaries of an old model—much like a modern doctor insisting on treating present-day illnesses using the knowledge and sciences of a past age (Hamzawi, 1995).

Indeed, several Arabic linguistic phenomena and judgments are now in urgent need of being redefined in light of MSA. The goal is to identify what is genuinely in use and to discard what is proposed only hypothetically. The outcomes of these renewed readings must, in turn, be reflected in both language teaching and linguistic research.

The phenomenon of MVSTBV also falls within this scope. There is no doubt that MSA has a position regarding the excessive number of examples traditionally found in CA heritage texts. However, this position cannot be determined through speculation or reached by haste. It requires a deep investigation of the examples and a quantitative analysis that will ultimately yield conclusions capable of challenging the assumptions of any linguistic phenomenon by accounting for temporal shifts and the evolving conditions of the language community.

Indeed, a careful tracking of this phenomenon in MSA will demonstrate—without exaggeration or understatement—that its examples have significantly declined. What was once common in heritage texts is now largely abandoned in modern usage.

3.4. Adapting AFL Dictionaries to the MVSTBV Between Stability and Variation

One of the most complex and pressing issues language learners face is the phenomenon of multiplicity within a single linguistic item, that is, the branching of one subject into multiple forms or versions. Examples in Arabic include MVSTBV and the presence of multiple plural forms for a singular noun (Alhroot & Al-tarawneh, 2025).

Labeling Arabic with these phenomena without testing or refining their examples, despite the passage of time and the diversity of Arabic-speaking communities, indicates that such issues will persist across generations. This runs counter, at minimum, to rigorous linguistic research and descriptive methodology. Indeed, these labels may harden into rigid patterns that burden the Arabic language and cast shadows over its teaching and learning. As a result, learners face added complexity that makes Arabic harder to master and adds to its list of complex linguistic features.

This situation also fosters a negative impression of Arabic and may provoke hesitation among prospective learners. Such hesitation can partially undermine their motivation, inclinations, and psychological readiness, which all play central roles in their willingness to learn.

To address this, Arabic teaching methods and their accompanying phonetic and lexical resources for both native and non-native speakers must directly tackle these phenomena. They must adapt to the evolving nature of MSA and not cling to the static forms found in traditional texts. Over time, Arabic has undergone changes that have reduced or eliminated some of these phenomena and rules.

A key component in Arabic learning is the dictionary. It clearly plays an essential role in language acquisition and significantly enriches learners' linguistic repertoire, especially when it includes varied vocabulary and structures (Scholfield, 1982). Therefore, authors of educational dictionaries must avoid introducing artificial issues that are disconnected from the natural linguistic usage learners seek. Instead, they should focus on elements that serve learners communicatively, even in the grammatical, morphological, and phonological information provided in the dictionary.

The field of language teaching no longer tolerates arbitrary judgments, improvisation, conjecture, or mere repetition of statements without verification, scrutiny, or consideration of their evolution. Rather, it demands attention to every recent development and prioritizes what proves functional and beneficial in language learning (Alhroot & Alhroot, 2022).

Although modern dictionaries designed for AFL, whether monolingual or bilingual, have largely adapted to these phenomena according to usage in MSA, they still show some influence from CA dictionaries. This is particularly evident in repeating examples of these phenomena.

4. Methodology

4.1. Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design that integrates quantitative frequency analysis with qualitative comparative inquiry. It seeks to re-examine the phenomenon of MVSTBV across three strata: CA, MSA, and dictionaries used in teaching AFL. This design allows for both diachronic and functional comparisons, thus capturing the phenomenon's historical depth alongside its pedagogical relevance. The approach is fully aligned with the study's dual objectives.

4.2. Data Collection

The data were collected from three categories of sources:

- CA: Data were derived from the study of Alam and Alazmi (2023), which documented verbal noun patterns as attested in major classical linguistic resources.
- Data were extracted from *Mu'jam al-Lugha al-'Arabiyya al-Mu'āsira* مُعْجَم اللُّغَةِ الْعَرَبِيَّةِ الْمُعَاصِرَةِ (2008), a comprehensive and representative lexicon of contemporary Arabic usage.
- AFL dictionaries: Four AFL dictionaries were selected according to the following criteria:
 1. Proven use in Arabic language instruction for non-native speakers.
 2. Typological diversity (including both monolingual and bilingual formats).
 3. Representation of diverse learner backgrounds (Indonesian, Turkish, and English).

The dictionaries analyzed include:

- *Al-Mu'jam al-'Arabī bayna yadayka* المَعْجَم الْعَرَبِي بَيْنَ يَدَيْكَ (Arabic–Arabic).
- Kamus Fi'il–Kata Kerja (Arabic–Indonesian).
- Türkçe–Arapça/ Arapça–Türkçe Karşılıklar Kılavuzu (Arabic–Turkish).
- Lingualism Arabic Learner's Dictionary (Arabic–English).

4.3. Instruments and Data Processing

Data were manually extracted and organized using structured digital tables designed to classify verbs, count occurrences of VNs, and analyze morphological patterns across different dictionaries. This allowed for the precise quantification of the frequency and distribution of single versus multiple noun entries per verb.

4.4. Data Analysis

A comparative analysis was conducted to examine:

- The degree of VN multiplicity in both Arabic classical and modern dictionaries.
- The extent to which AFL dictionaries retain, simplify, or adapt the phenomenon.
- Patterns of convergence or divergence between historical usage and modern teaching practices.

The analysis involved quantifying the frequency of single versus multiple VN entries per verb and categorizing them according to their dictionary type and time period.

5. Results

To answer the first research question, I refer to a notable study conducted by Alam and Alazmi (2023), which focused on documenting trilateral bare verbs and their VNs within the framework of the “computational lexicon”. The study revealed a substantial volume of data, identifying 8,203 trilateral verbs that collectively yielded a total of 15,200 VNs. Notably, more than half of these verbs 56.8% were associated with a single VN, while 22.3% exhibited variation by having two VNs. What is particularly striking is that 1,717 verbs 20.9% had three or more VNs, with some verbs having up to 15.

To answer the second research question, I systematically tracked all trilateral bare verbs and their corresponding VNs in *Mu‘jam al-lugha al-‘Arabiyya al-mu‘āšira*, which contains 10,475 trilateral and augmented verbs, as noted by its author. The data collection followed the principle of usage in MSA, so any verb or VN not attested in actual practice was excluded from the corpus. To ensure precision, we also consulted a very recent dictionary by Abdulhadi and Arafeh (2023) to verify the frequency of verb usage in MSA. The total number of documented trilateral verbs (intransitive or transitive verb) with verified VNs reached 1,168. Among these, 1,051 verbs accounted for 90% and were linked to only one VN, while 112 verbs, representing 9.6%, had two VNs, and 5 verbs, accounting for .4%, had three VNs.

To answer the third question, I surveyed trilateral bare verbs and their VNs in one monolingual dictionary and three bilingual dictionaries designed for teaching AFL, as shown in Table 2. Our analysis shows that the *Kamus Fi‘il-Kata Kerja* dictionary includes 100% of verbs with only one VN, indicating no representation of verbs with MVNs. In contrast, the *Türkçe-Arapça/Arapça-Türkçe Karşılıklar Kılavuzu* dictionary exhibits significant diversity, with 7.5% of verbs having three or more VNs — the highest proportion among the dictionaries we examined. The *Al-Mu‘jam al-‘Arabī bayna yadayk* dictionary displays a high percentage (81.9%) of verbs associated with a single VN and only 1.6% with MVNs. Meanwhile, the *Lingualism Arabic Learner's Dictionary* is characterized by a high proportion (89.8%) of verbs with one VN, with no recorded cases of verbs having three or more VNs. These findings highlight fundamental differences in the thoroughness with which these dictionaries document the morphological diversity of VNs.

Table 2. Verbs and VNs in Monolingual and Bilingual Arabic Language Teaching Dictionaries

Dictionary	Total	Number of VNs					
		1	%	2	%	3 or more	%
<i>Al-Mu‘jam al-‘Arabī bayna yadayk</i>	1043	854	81.9	172	16.5	17	1.6
<i>Kamus Fi‘il-Kata Kerja</i>	559	559	100	0	0	0	0
<i>Lingualism Arabic Learner's Dictionary</i>	941	845	89.8	96	10.2	0	0
<i>Türkçe-Arapça/Arapça-Türkçe Karşılıklar Kılavuzu</i>	3152	2261	71.7	656	20.8	235	7.5

Note: The statistics include only verbs that have explicitly mentioned VNs in the dictionaries.

6. Discussion

The preceding results have revealed key patterns in the distribution and evolution of MVN forms in Arabic. This section interprets the findings through linguistic, historical, and pedagogical lenses, aiming to explain the underlying causes and implications of the phenomenon across CA, MSA, and AFL dictionaries.

6.1. Variation in Classical Arabic

One of the most notable observations made by readers of classical linguistic references is the variation in the VNs attributed to a single verb, both in quantity and type. A verb may have only one VN listed in one dictionary, while two or more appear in others. A clear example of such variation is the verb *zami'a* ظَمِيَ "to thirst". The verb is attested in al-Azhari, al-Jawhari, Ibn Faris, al-Saghani, and al-Fayyumi with one VN. Two VNs are found in al-Farahidi and Ibn 'Abbad, while three are attested in Ibn Seedah and Ibn Manzur. Four appear in al-Fayruzabadi.

Regarding variation in form, the verb *jashā'a* جَشَأَ "to belch" provides a clear example. Although lexicographers agree it has only one VN, they differ in its form. Most record it as *jushū* جُشُوْء, Al-Saghani as *jash* جَشَأَ, Al-Farabi as *jushā* جُشَاء, and Ibn al-Qatta' as *jush* جُشَأَ.

Just as the variation in morphological inflection has contributed to the proliferation of VNs, as seen in the verb *haqada* حَقَدَ "to bear a grudge" which has two VNs: *hiqd* حَقْد and *haqd* حَقْد, without these forms necessarily having a prominent presence in the same linguistic environment, this multiplicity stems from the variation in linguistic environments.

This multiplicity extends beyond the morphological structure to influence meaning, as the meanings of these VNs vary according to the context. For example, the verb *hanna* حَنَّ "to feel compassion or to long for", which often has two VNs listed in dictionaries: *hanīn* حَنِين "longing", and *hanān* حَنَان "compassion or sympathy". However, *hanīn* حَنِين is a VN derived from the verb with the meaning "longing", while *hanān* حَنَان serves as a VN with the meaning "compassion or sympathy".

The study of linguistic heritage reveals that some references cited by linguists for multiple verbs were not commonly used in old Arabic poetry or prose. Instead, they were rare and mostly appear in isolated examples, often stemming from personal interpretations or rhetorical licenses, rather than representing a general linguistic phenomenon. For instance, the verbs *dhahaba* ذَهَبَ "to go", *kasada* كَسَدَ "to be stagnant", and *fasada* فَسَدَ "to corrupt" form their VNs *dhahāb* ذَهَاب and *dhuhūb* دُھُوب, *kasād* كَسَاد and *kusūd* كُسُود, *fasād* فَسَاد and *fusūd* فُسُود, but these VNs appear only in rare instances, most often in dialectical or poetic contexts. The Doha Historical Dictionary (<https://www.dohadictionary.org/dictionary>), a reliable recent reference in tracing word origins, illustrates this approach, recording a unique poetic example for the VN *kusūd* كُسُود and noting the first appearance of *dhuhūb* دُھُوب in an anonymous verse, while failing to find any instances for *fusūd* فُسُود. This limited usage indicates that these VNs belong to specific dialectal or poetic environments, highlighting that their diversity was a response to specific expressive needs, rather than a permanent linguistic vitality.

Therefore, relying on a solitary poetic line to establish the existence of a VN reflects the individual creativity of the poet rather than a linguistic consensus or a dialectal tradition. Each classical poet had the freedom to coin new words for one-time use in a line of poetry, which were often forgotten with time. This implies that VNs not arising from the variety of Arabic dialects were due to rhetorical necessities, not a permanent linguistic function in prose speech.

Thus, it can be concluded that the phenomenon of VN multiplicity, within the framework of heritage, was born out of specific circumstances: including the vastness of compilation, the variety of

dialects, and the allowance of collections to accommodate different forms without filtering, which exaggerated the phenomenon numerically without making it a consistent or standardized usage.

6.2. The Reduction of VN Multiplicity in MSA

Moving to MSA, the situation has changed clearly. The phenomenon of MVNs has significantly declined, now constituting less than 10% in modern studies, a shift that does not indicate linguistic degradation but rather expresses a natural evolution towards economy and clarity.

Modern language, with its communicative, media, and educational demands, tends towards simplification, favoring the most common and functional forms. This is evident in the preference of speakers and editors for VNs like *ikhā'* إخاء over *mu'ākhā* مؤاخاة, derived from the verb *ākhā* آخى, meaning "to establish brotherhood or close bonds." This preference is further corroborated by data from the ArabiCorpus (<https://arabicorpus.byu.edu>) corpus, where *ikhā'* إخاء occurs 805 times, compared to only 36 times for *mu'ākhā* مؤاخاة.

These morphological shifts in MSA —particularly the contraction of the MVSTBV phenomenon— can be interpreted within the framework of linguistic economy, which encourages the reduction of unnecessary morphological variation. The decline in the number of VN forms reflects a broader linguistic tendency to streamline choices available to speakers, thereby reducing cognitive and articulatory effort and enhancing communicative efficiency. This simplification aligns with the natural evolution of language toward clarity and economy, whereby less frequent or less functional forms are gradually marginalized in favor of those that are more regular and widely used.

This trend is not entirely new; rather, it represents a modern expression of a long-standing linguistic trait: the language's ability to adapt and select in service of meaning and efficiency. Speakers do not reject morphological richness, but they use it only when needed. Thus, MSA favors moderation, choosing from its heritage what works without bearing the full burden of morphological variation.

However, MSA dictionaries still show some occurrence of MVSTBV drawn from religious and classical influences. Although these VNs live on in the memories of scholars and educated readers, they rarely appear in everyday use. In linguistic terms, they move closer to what we call "passive vocabulary": present in Competence, absent in Performance.

6.3. Factors Behind VN Multiplicity in CA vs. MSA

The findings indicate that the phenomenon of multiple verbal nouns (VNs) derived from triliteral bare verbs was more prominent in classical sources than in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). This reflects both structural and functional shifts in the Arabic morphological system. While classical dictionaries adopted an extensive and inclusive approach to documenting morphological and semantic variation, MSA has clearly moved toward limiting this multiplicity, favoring the most common and functionally effective forms. This shift does not suggest a decline in the language's expressive capacity, but rather a natural tendency toward linguistic economy and communicative clarity, where less frequent or overlapping forms are gradually excluded from active use.

6.4. How VN Variation Shapes AFL Lexicographic Practice

Educational dictionaries, particularly those designed for the Australian English language, strongly reflect this linguistic shift. Most of these dictionaries tend to reduce variation and typically list only one VN for each verb, in line with their educational function that requires simplification and gradual progression. Statistical analysis of these dictionaries clearly shows that the vast majority do not include the phenomenon of MVSTBV. This reflects a clear commitment to the modern linguistic reality, where the phenomenon has significantly declined and is close to functional extinction. Such an approach aligns well with the principles of functional linguistics and the needs of learners. It

confirms that the multiplicity of VNs documented in traditional references was more a result of efforts to compile and preserve language than an accurate depiction of a stable linguistic reality.

Moreover, this absence should not be considered a deficiency or oversight. Instead, it conveys a profound understanding of the role of modern language, which tends toward simplification, concision, and clarity. Modern languages naturally regulate their morphological choices and marginalize multiple forms unless there is a clear functional or semantic distinction. This justifies excluding the phenomenon of MVSTBV from dictionaries aimed at learners. Learners do not need to know every possible form of the VN but rather the most common and contextually relevant ones.

Paradoxically, some dictionaries remain attached to traditional references and include forms used only in religious texts. For example, the word *matraba* مَتْرَبَة, meaning "extreme poverty," appears in *Al-Mu'jam Al-'Arabi Bayna Yadayk* (Alfawzan et al., 2004). If the authors had considered such observations in later editions, the number of verbs with MVNs might have better reflected the actual linguistic reality. Including such forms in AFL dictionaries seems to reflect the authors' interest in religious vocabulary and their desire to highlight words found in the Qur'an and Hadith, even if this comes at the expense of communicative and functional aspects (Alhroot, 2023).

This raises a fundamental educational question: Should a dictionary serve as a tool to preserve heritage or as a means to facilitate learning? If the goal is to combine both, how can one strike a balance between scientific accuracy and educational simplicity? This study argues that combining historical documentation with descriptive analysis provides the most comprehensive approach. Authors of educational dictionaries should base their work on actual language use rather than an idealized or imagined form of the language. They need to revise their criteria so that the dictionary becomes a functional guide, rather than merely a linguistic archive.

Dictionaries that include rare or religious forms do so out of cultural or heritage motives rather than linguistic necessity. This suggests a lack of clarity in defining the educational purpose of the dictionary: Is it intended as a tool for heritage documentation or for functional teaching? This confusion complicates the learner's understanding of the living language and makes it difficult to distinguish between actively used vocabulary and forms that are rare or specific to religious or rhetorical contexts.

Furthermore, listing MVSTBV without clearly specifying the contexts of their use creates an illusion of synonymy or imposes an unnecessary morphological burden that distracts learners rather than helping them. This demonstrates that a successful educational dictionary filters heritage through the lens of contemporary usage, retaining what is effective and discarding what is outdated or non-communicative.

Therefore, the attitude of educational dictionaries toward this phenomenon reveals their understanding of language function. The more they avoid it, the closer they align with linguistic reality. The more they insist on it, the weaker their grasp of linguistic change and the less innovative their educational vision. In light of this analysis, it becomes clear that although the phenomenon is established in heritage, it has no place in contemporary language or serious teaching dictionaries except as a cultural reference or a non-functional scholarly embellishment.

7. Conclusion

The phenomenon of MVSTBV in Arabic is not a fossil of linguistic history. It still plays a role—albeit in new forms—in shaping the structure of MSA. Yet its presence has shifted. This study reveals that the abundance once documented in classical references is no longer evident in today's usage or modern educational dictionaries. MSA follows a different logic. It reduces variation, favors clarity, and preserves only what serves a function. This invites us to revisit classical linguistic phenomena not as sacred truths, but as living patterns shaped by time, usage, and context.

The study focused on a rare yet striking feature in Arabic among Semitic languages: the phenomenon of MVSTBV. A comparison between classical and modern dictionaries revealed a sharp decline in this multiplicity. This change is empirical, arising from actual usage and reflecting a natural morphological evolution.

The analysis also showed clear differences in how teaching dictionaries handle this phenomenon. Some stayed bound to tradition. Others followed real-world usage. This gap highlights the urgent need for revising AFL dictionaries. These tools must reflect how the language lives today—not how it was once recorded. They must serve clarity, support learners, and favor what is used over what is merely remembered.

By contrasting classical linguistic traditions with contemporary corpora and teaching materials, this study re-evaluates MVSTBV not as a static linguistic artifact, but as a dynamic feature influenced by time, context, and communicative needs.

In summary, the phenomenon of MVSTBV cannot be completely denied in CA, yet at the same time, it should not be accepted without revision. It is a historically limited phenomenon that calls for reevaluation in light of actual usage, linguistic development, and educational contexts. This study aims to reexamine the phenomenon from a dual realistic perspective both CA and MSA— to clarify its boundaries and guide how it should be addressed in dictionaries for AFL.

Such research would contribute both to Arabic linguistic studies and to inclusive, sustainable language education practices aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 4: Quality Education.

8. Recommendations

AFL dictionaries should prioritize real language use over inherited variation by selecting the most frequent and communicatively effective VNs, while minimizing the inclusion of rare, poetic, or contextually outdated forms. Teaching materials should also reflect contemporary linguistic realities, ensuring consistency and clarity that foster learners' functional proficiency. Educators, in turn, are encouraged to focus on the most widely used VN forms, helping learners avoid cognitive overload caused by unnecessary morphological complexity.

9. Future Research

Future research should focus on:

- Examine contemporary Arabic through comprehensive corpus-based studies covering diverse fields such as media, education, and digital communication. These studies will help identify the key morphological and functional features that distinguish current usage from outdated or inherited forms
- Investigate how morphological variation affects the acquisition of AFL. This includes re-evaluating other linguistic phenomena in light of MSA, to determine whether such variation facilitates or hinders effective language learning
- Explore the role of intelligent digital tools, including AI-based dictionaries and grammar assistants, in helping learners identify and internalize the most common and functional forms. These technologies may reduce the cognitive burden associated with excessive morphological complexity while preserving the richness of the language.

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About the Contributor(s)

Mohammad Alhroot, PhD, is an Associate Professor of Linguistics at the German Jordanian University. He earned his doctorate in Linguistics from the University of Münster, Germany, in 2016. Dr. Alhroot has extensive experience in university teaching and academic administration. He has published numerous peer-reviewed research articles in the fields of linguistics, morphology, rhetoric, and linguistic criticism, including studies on Arabic vocabulary, lexicography, and statistical analysis in teaching Arabic as a foreign language. He is also the author of notable works such as the *Dictionary of the Witnesses of the Augmented Verbs in the Poems of One Hundred and Five Pre-Islamic and Post-Islamic Poets*. Dr. Alhroot has served as an external examiner for many graduate theses at Jordanian universities and has contributed extensively to both cultural and linguistic journals.

Email: mohammad.alhrout@gju.edu.jo

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2772-9953>

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